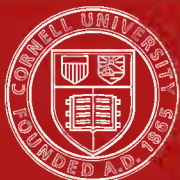


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THE HOUSE OF OMRI

PART II. THE SONS OF AHAB.

THE HOUSE OF OMRI.

A Dramatic Poem.

PART II. THE SONS OF AHAB.

BY

STANLEY WEALL.

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THE PERSONS.

CHORUS : *Women of Jezebel.*

WATCHMAN.

JEHORAM.

JEZEBEL.

HERALD.

AHAZIAH.

JEHU.

MESSENGER.

THE HOUSE OF OMRI.

PART II.—THE SONS OF AHAB.

SCENE—*Open Court in the Palace of Jezreel.*

THE CHORUS.

CHORUS.

PRUNE we our roses till deliverance dawn !
Lop off the lily ! Let the myrtle die !
Mock us no more, blue sky,
Bright fountain, mossy lawn !
Bright fountain, from the heart of Naboth drawn
With guiltless blood to fertilise the field,
Darken the splendour of thy crystal shield,
And cease awhile the music of thy flow :
Nor any longer lade the passing hours
With fragrance, O ye flowers
That o'er the tomb of the unburied blow !
With quiet voices and in sad array

Lét us for peace our prayers pray :
Peace in the daytime, peace at fall of night,
Peace in the night-time, peace at dawn of day,
Peace in the passes, peace in the broad way ;
Peace on the city-crested height,
And peace amid the houses of the mean ;
Peace with the wrathful prophets of the Queen ;
Peace on the navied sea, the embattled sod ;
Peace between god and god.
For helpless we and undefended
Hear yet the mutterings of old alarms ;
How should we think the just man's quarrel
ended ?
Pollution gathers from the ground he tended :
The hot air listens for the clash of arms.
Then tarry not, great Chief !
Come soon, O Captain ! be thy warfare brief :
Upon thy helm be victory bright,
And on thy shield with slaughter gilded :
Strengthen the towers the Syrian hath builded,
And bring our husbands home from fight.
Oh, bring the maid her lover, bring the boy,
Thou son of Nimshi, to a welcoming breast :
After war's trouble fitting is love's rest,
And toil remembered sweetens joy ;
With thankful heart, well quit of camp's annoy
And leaguer, shall he sing
Thy name in Kirharaseth and of late

In Gilead's captive gate
Exalted by prosperity and the King.
Alas ! not dear, not dear to wives
The bridle's clash, the burnishing of knives,
And girding on of swords,
When the great masters and the mighty lords,
Which have dominion over tent and town
And flock and granary and field and fold,
As merchants with their merchandise come down
To sell man's flesh for gold.
They counted not our hands that could not smite,
Nor measured they our tears,
But sent with lamentation and with fears
To war long since their glittering battle rolled :
And O ye gods who render dreams aright,
Interpret me the perils, night by night
Which I thenceforth behold :
Seeming to lie, a weary vigil keeping,
Musing old prophecy and past record,
With unforbidden eyelids fondly weeping
The absence of my lord,
When lo ! a shout hath waked the city sleeping,
And sudden fire, and thrusting with the sword ;
Rouse, maid and mother, rouse ye from your rest !
Weep, wail, and beat the breast !
Hark ! for the Syrian trumpet calls,
And dreadful shapes apparent in the gloom,
Larger than man, disdainful of her doom

Pass from the city walls :

A quiet land they seek and ampler room.

I hear, ah me ! I hear

The approach of war, the chariot wildly driven,

Swift shock, and crash of axle riven,

And flying feet, and plunging of the spear.

Hide us, ye mountains ! for the foe is near.

Only the valiant and the vain

At no god's altar seek to kneel,

But, gathered to the fitful trumpet's peal,

With labour and with pain

A heavy cause uphold.

'Mid the broke marble and the burning gold

Of thy fair palaces, Jezreel,

Until the dim day-breaking

For token of thy sorrow doth discover

A piteous row of prisoners ringed with steel.

She shall depart, depart her dead forsaking,

New-widowed wife, or maid that lacks a lover ;

She shall not deck his bier,

Nor make long tarrying here,

Led captive through the morning gray

To serve the Syrian mothers far away.

Yet wherefore of defeat and lamentation,

O Israel, sing the song ?

To whom should rather merriment belong,

And duteous supplication,

With corn and wine on faithful altars poured.

For careless now the fisher floats unmoored,
At the wind's will, on Galilee's blue lake,
And through swart pastureland and tangled brake
The shepherd leads the sheep
How far soe'er afield their thirst to slake ;
And the tired hind may 'neath the cedar sleep ;
And swords no more thy scanty harvest reap :
For all thine enemies, Israel, are brought low.
Hazael in Damascus waits :
He spies far off the watch-fires of the foe ;
And funerals block the gates.
O women, wherefore sing the song of woe ?
His counsellors about him stand,
Gold-crested kings, and captains from the fray ;
They look with wonder on the desolate land,
And musing softly say,
' Rimmon hath seen what in the dark was done
Let us with oil and wine the god appease :
Though in the dark ye do it, yet he sees :
Slay not his servant ; reverence his son.'
O Israel, why the strain
Of city sacked, of captive maiden ?
Thine are the arrows of the rushing rain ;
For thee the thunder-clouds are laden ;
Thy war the winds maintain.
Heard ye not how Moab fell ?
Kings came from Edom and the land was dry :
As lies à lion in mid-course to die,

Whom hunter's darts or grievous pangs compel
From the far coolness of his bushy dell,
So lay they ; and the vagrant foe
Knew it and gathered, as the jackals know
And gather round him, pacing in a ring,
And grind their teeth accursed,
Each fearful if too soon he spring,
And each one grudging but he flesh him first.
Therefore spake Judah's King,
' Seek out a minstrel ; ye have heard—
Perform—the prophet's word,
And look that what he biddeth that ye do.'
And straightway from his tent,
Brought to no banquet, by no riotous crew
Constrained, yet still delaying,
Like to a lamb in unknown pastures straying,
Amazed amid their armament,
One of the minstrels to Elisha went.
And the fierce kings were silent for a space ;
And the seer looked upon his face.
A harp they set, a harp of heavy gold ;
Softly he struck the string,
And sang the while, as mournful maidens sing,
Disasters great, and miseries of old,
Ships sunk, towns sacked, and burnings of the
bold,
And treasons toward the King :
Anger and pain, fire, famine and the sword

Thrilled through each deepening chord.
Howbeit nought prophesied the seer,
Standing apart as one that doth not hear,
His shaggy eyes upon the ground fast keeping.
Then with loud hand the wide harp sweeping,
The minstrel sang the song of men,
The joy of war, great armies blocked by ten,
Cities delivered, massacres and fires,
And tyrants clothed with shame ;
And while he sang of valour and of fame,
Chanting the glories of our sires,
There leapt a spirit from the clashing wires,
And counsel out of music came,
And Israel smote the foe,
(Such words the son of Shaphat spake,)
And drave their tossing banners to and fro,
And marred the good land utterly, and did break
All their fenced cities, every one ;
And Mesha grieved and offered up his son
For a burnt-offering in the face of all,
Even his first-born, on the city wall.

WATCHMAN.

Ye servants of Jehoram, spread the feast
Bid the musicians and the singing-men
Make ready ; for the south is full of spears,
And harness and bright bridles and red plumes :
Great Ahaziah, Judah's King, draws nigh.

CHORUS.

O city ever prosperous for the wrong !⁽¹⁾
O refuge for the slayer of men !
Thine is it, Ramoth, if our song
Be as in old time sad ; if now as then
We look for no good from the murderer's den,
Small comfort, Ramoth, brief prosperity,
Being guiltless, out of thee.
Under the pestilent shadow of thy walls
The good man's cattle rot ;
They droop and die ; the good man prospers not :
But welfare to the wicked falls,
And his fields flourish and his stores increase.
O city of destruction, send us peace,
And unscarred warriors from a woundless fray ;
Thine ancient anger let the King's hurt stay,
And bring us no more wail and crying,
With dead men's biers and litters of the dying
Choking the steep highway.
Woe didst thou work in Omri's day,
A city of sorrow unto Israel still ;
His mighty men of valour turned and fled ;
With blood he did thy rivers fill,
He levelled all thy valleys with his dead.
Small honour won the King, nor better sped
A name more bright in battle when our lord
Took shield again and drew his veteran sword,
And through the morning went

To free thy stricken turrets from the foe,
Nor drank at eve triumphant in his tent,
Nor sorrowed for his captains slain,
But fought his last or ever the light was low,
O Gilead, on thy bloody plain :
The archer bent his bow,
And with glad wing for no mean bosom bound
The shaft accursed, her prey descrying,
Sang like a bird above the battle flying,
And passage through his harness found,
And in a king's heart rest. Was this
Thy work, O city, or unsandalled Fate
By devious path approaching soon or late,
Or a god's wrath for honour given amiss,
For sacrifice and fire and midnight wail
And much regard of Baal ?

[JEHORAM and JEZEBEL enter.

JEHORAM.

What hidden pleasure may in pomp abide
Use hath forgotten and love never knew :
Yon sturdy hills which, climbing step by step,
Fling their blue shadows upon Jordan's flood,
And this embowered glade, this marble grove,
This vine-clad casement of the summer sky,
Where evermore from dawn to fall of dew
The dove, grey-breasted visitor, laments,
Methinks are fairer to a King's tired sight

Than scarlet canopies ; the fountain's plash
More musical in his accustomed ear
Than trumpets or the voice of singing-men.

JEZEBEL.

Yet have I known not one king, no, nor two
Liker to grieve at lessening of their state
Than find a joy in tedious honours docked.
Remit no due observance. Go ye hence,
And greet the King of Judah, bowing low,
And wash his feet, and crown his cup with wine,
And bid him reverent welcome to Jezreel.

CHORUS.

We speed to do him service, mighty Queen.
[They go out.]

JEZEBEL.

Some gifts, my son, are given us by the gods,
And some doth our own forethought give ourselves
Of greater price and stuff more durable :
Let such be thine ; the gods have done their part,
Delivering up, as 'twere a vanquished foe
Whom thou should'st hack and splinter with thy
sword,
A friend whom thou must tangle with thy tongue.
The gods have done their part : if thou do thine
This trivial embassy shall mark a day
Kept in earth's calendar with feast and flower

For ever, if I err not : towns which yet
Are sleeping silent in the unquarried stone
Shall on their gateways and their bastions grave
In golden characters the words we spake,
And where we stood, as if on holy ground,
Kings unbegotten shall do sacrifice.
Nor scorn the purpose which thy sire maintained,
Famine, and querulous discord of the tribes,
And war, and pestilence accounting nought,
So might he patch as far as fortune willed
That robe whose royalty the Shilohite⁽²⁾ tore,
And make two kingdoms in free friendship one.
Howbeit ever the dark seers of Jah,
Moving with spells among the common kind,
Opposed him, and the heart of Judah's King
Was troubled, for he feared : whose sceptre now
Borne by the blood of Sidon will not blench :
This youth, our kin, will aid our purposes ;
Not only eager as ourselves to slay
Yon crowned assassin of his master's sleep,
But prompt with policy and simple heart
To press our cause the wide world's circle through,
A loyal friend of our advantage still,
Our gain his guerdon and our honour his.
Be instant therefore ; take this happy time
And bind him fast, nor fear in turn to pledge
All friendship ; for thy father sowed the grain,
But hard and ever stubborn was the field.

JEHORAM.

My father's will is mine; nor, lady, less
Thy wishes move me : he that lacks a sire
Oft lacks the shield to shelter his frail youth,
Oft lacks the spur to prick him to renown ;
Untimely death is ill inheritance :
But more than father, yea, than mother more
The gods, great Queen, permitted me in thee ;
Thee have I revered ever ; from that brow
Bent over me, austere ringed with gold,
And from thy port and majesty divine
My boyhood imaged holy Ashtaroth,
Scarce mortal thinking thee, and scarce a king
The dim imperial shadow at thy side.
Base were it therefore if I scorned thee now
Or did refuse thy counsel ; for in me
Dwells neither craft nor wit nor wariness ;
The fighting, not the winning, makes my joy ;
And as my father lived and kept thy word,
So would I live, and die not otherwise,
Where the red swords are thickest, and men toil
With dust and groans and pressings of the knee,
In the mid gulf, on the frayed edge of war.

JEZEBEL.

O boy, be thou more fortunate than thy sire,
Like in all else ! Dominion and esteem
Were his, and honour, handmaid of the brave :

Peerless in war, in peace no parallel
Hath Israel found nor Judah ; quickly moved,
Yet to forgiveness as to anger prone ;
Mild in his monarchy and gracious aye,
And princely in his going ; to the proud
A scourge of steel, but balsam to the meek ;
By Ashtaroath favoured and by Heaven's King :—
Even such I knew him. Lo, yon marble form,
Which fronts our fretfulness with calm regard,
Dreaming, it may be, of fights lost and won,
Great things forgotten, unremembered names,
And marriages and banquets of the dead !
Let not thy father be a record mere,
Nor hold his fame a shadow : yonder casque
To his own hurt the ruthless Syrian spoiled,
And from the sweep of that war-dinted sword
Fled thirty kings and three.—O chieftain high,
If that be true which holy bards have taught,
And thou with gracious influence serene
Dost the bright marches of the sun invade,
To tilth and fallow bounteous, fold and byre
Blessing with health, and with well-nurtured
 young
Increasing ; or at what diviner board,
In what dread company a welcome guest,
Thou dost the savour and the fume partake
Of ample sacrifice and incense rich,
For aye undying mid thy deathless peers :

Oh yet regard with favour, mighty King,
The narrow bounds that were of old thine own,
Nor scorn the base necessities of earth.
Hear this our crying, and awhile forget
The blue cloud-paven palaces of Baal ;
Heaven forget, forget the choral stars :
Turn, turn upon thy children those clear eyes
Which unabashed endure the blazing gold
Of Moloch's armour ; to our lips incline
That ear which melodies immortal fill ;
Nor visit on us, O great god, the offence
That we ignored thee cradled in thy clay.

JEHORAM.

O lady, let my prayer climb heaven with thine !
Sweet sound the father's praises to the son.

JEZEBEL.

Fond worshipper, thy prayer hath maimed her
wing,
And limps and lags and flutters fruitless home
Unaided : for what skilleth prayer from thee
Who hast contemned the god thy father served,
And marred the sacred Image he set up ?
Ah me ! where lies it, that resplendent form
Which leaf on leaf, and gem by lustrous gem,
With servile sweat and tributary gold
Supreme artificers from Sidon wrought,

Raising it high, a world's religion once,
To soar beyond Samaria's utmost towers
And dim day's advent with its brighter beams ?
Doth it inhabit the drear-plunging sea,
And take, for plash of penitential blood,
The lapping of the idle wave, and hear
For those loud litanies the sea-bird's moan ?
Or in the unflowering desert it doth lie,
Shot evermore with noontide's fiery darts,
And overwhelmed with midnight's lashing flood :
There is no man regardeth it ; that arm
Of whose protection mighty kings were fain
Now shields the grey kite's offspring from the
cold :

That brow, which glittering like another star
Did take the homage and the prayers of men,
Beasts of the wilderness with cloven hoof
Now stamp upon and mangle. Woe is me !
Where'er he dwelleth all may scorn him now :
All now may scorn whom few might worship
once ;

When the isles sent ambassadors, when lute
Rang, and trump sounded, and the nations heard,
And priests, the chosen of a chosen tribe,
With wine and oil, with victim and with song,
At sacred eve, at holy morn, adored
The bland presentment of almighty Baal.

JEHORAM.

Not moved by fear of any threat divine,
Nor for mine own advantage did I this ;
Far less, elate and arrogant at heart,
As one contemptuous of Heaven's Lord
Whom thou and I yet dutifully serve.
But, deeming that it ill became a king
To choose too nicely of his people's gods,
I did with reverence and sorrow move,
Not violate,—nor was thy voice, O Queen,
Urgent against it,—that tremendous form,
The like of which there was not in the world.

JEZEBEL.

Yet have we sinned, Jehoram, thou and I,
Nor gained our purpose, nor are like to gain.
War, war hath sundered the eternal heavens ;
The gods have armed them and arrayed their
ranks :
Proffer of peace they make not nor accept :
Choose thou thy captain. In the distant days,
Nigh that blue sea which never tempest moved,
In Sidon's marble palaces there sate
A grey-haired king, Baal's servant : every turn
And trick of governing in peace and war
Beyond compare of human wit he knew ;
And to the slender maiden at his side,

Whom best he loved, his late and lonely joy,
He did impart them : but his warlike sons
Abode far off, neglectful of his lore,
Seeking brute battle or the chase. And still
He spake of Baal, the shelter of his house,
' With him was Baal,' he wrote it on his shield,
He graved it on his signet for a charm,
And prospering in that name shook off assault,
From bright-eyed manhood to late-lingering age,
As the unriven rock doth shake the foam,
Or as the lion shakes the hunter dog.
Oh, we have fallen away, we have done ill.
Baal built the house, and with his props we fall.
No vantage of Elijah's death have we ;
No hope of concord to outweigh our guilt :
For Shaphat's son hath dead or living caught
His cloak, and lo ! from Beersheba to Dan
That warrior people to whose king my sire
Betrothed me, that blood-spattered eager stock
Which left in Canaan from red end to end
No god inviolate and no altar whole,
Shrinks from the breath of some rope-girdled seer,
And shuts up fiery Conquest, and denies
Hot-fingered Vengeance pining for her meat.
Oh, be the sword drawn and the trumpet blown,
And no more parley granted them ! do men
Hold parley with the poison in their veins,
Or make concession to the stormy sea ?

Alas ! ill fares the people, ill the king,
When Treason, like a wolf in sheepskin clad,
Preys on unhindered in the weeds of Faith.

JEHORAM.

Peace, mother, be with thee and with thy words !
Lo ! Judah's lion ramps on yonder shields,
And in yon arch his royal banner dips.

CHORUS (*without*).

Oh, set your ranks in order, maidens ; sing,
And let your cymbals clash accord :
Benjamin's undefeated King
And Judah's mighty lord
Upon his way with merriment we bring.
Ye mountains of Gilboa, bow your heads !
Lo ! your delight, the longing of your eyes !
His feet are shod with silver ; where he treads
Watersprings in the desert rise ;
The drought avoids him and the famine flies.
His neck is like a castle of offence,
Whiter than Hebron's snow ;
Sweeter he is than frankincense,
And softer-stepping than the mountain roe
That hears the hunter's trumpet blow.
Oh weave the dance and foot the happy ground ;
Let psaltery and sackbut sound ;
And bid the dulcimer upraise
Loud melodies of praise.

This is our lover, our desire ; his breast
Is mid the battle like a buckler thrown
'Gainst sword and arrow to defend his own ;
His front is like the ocean when the west
Hath laid its waves to rest.
Lift up your song, O maidens, and rejoice ;
And ye rejoice, Jerusalem's fair daughters !
His wrath is like the midnight, and his voice
Terrible as the sound of waters.
His eyes are like the lamps of Tyre
Far-flashing through the dark o'er frith and foam,
When weary sailors journey home
After much travel, and with soft desire
Toward sweet wife and sweeter children yearn ;
The brazen prow they turn,
With chilly fingers kindling the rude fire,
And worship Ashtaroth, and crown the stern.

[Enter AHAZIAH attended.]

HERALD.

Welfare and glory be with Israel's King,
Peace and success and honour ! The great name
Of Jezebel I salute, and all the sons
Of Ahab : may prosperity be theirs !
King Ahaziah from Judah's border these
Hath brought, slight earnest of his studious love,
And bids my mouth deliver them : ten mules
With ivory laden, and with spice more rich

In bloom and scent than Sharon's richest rose :
Two talents of weighed silver : twenty cups
Carved with the tale of Mesha's twenty towns ;
Ruin smokes on them ; Kirharaseth stands
Alone : great store of vesture, warp and woof
The captive toil of Moabitish looms,
Soft as a swan and twice at Sidon dipt :
This belt, moreover, which the indignant breast
Of great Benhadad nigh Samaria's walls
Encircled, Ahab at Samaria won,
And for a sign thereafter of his love
Gave to Jehoshaphat, mild Judah's King ;
Silver it is, with bosses of red gold,
Thirty and two, a crown surmounting each ;
Here fitliest rendered : also yonder girls,
Clear-voiced, quick-footed, apt to weave the dance :
Armour from Edom, corn from Benjamin,
And thirty slaves from Tyre.

JEZEBEL.

O mighty prince,
Now is it worthier such gifts to give,
Or happier to receive them ?

JEHORAM.

Be it not ours,
Lady, to question. O dear youth and King,
Our will toward thee doth outpace our words :

Thrice welcome art thou : sword of the alien
Reap thy fields never !

AHAZIAH.

Blight and pestilence
Be far from thine, and all the gods defend
Thee and this kindred house ! To Jezebel
I kneel for greeting ; the fierce darts of time
Have left no dint upon that placid brow,
The council-chamber of victorious kings.
Age doth thee suit and service, even as I,
O royal dame, changing the cypress locks
To silver, and uneasy hope to calm,
Loud war to peace, and in the hearts of men
Mere love to veneration. Teach me now,
Here suppliant, like a son who fain would learn
To govern seated at his father's side,
What magic force is thine, what potent spell
That moulds disaster into lesser gain,
And wins compliance seeming to comply.
Barter for gold the secret of the charm
Wherewith thou hast, a generation long,
Kept Plenty captive to thy beckoning hand,
And shut the shy bird Victory in a cage,
Or clipped his wanton pinions that he fly
No further than Samaria to Jezreel.

JEZEBEL.

Kneel to thy sword, dear kinsman, not to her

Whose toilsome day is nigh the finish now,
Whate'er she did or ventured : woman's craft
Pales at the loud apparison of arms,
As pale the beaten Syrians when they hear
The battle-cry of Judah.

JEHORAM.

Couch we now,
Couch we together, and in this cool glade
The dusty road's long weariness forget,
And mock the breath of Heaven's flaming lord.
Trouble and care and all their brood abide
Far from this haunt of peace ; this is the home
Of still tranquillity, where never sounds
Aught louder than the nested dove's complaint,
Or whispering winds that to compassion woo
The swordsmen of the summer. Sit we nigh
In love, who nigh in battle sate, and be
Our chairs no further than in that red hour
Our chariots ; when we spied the rebel's wall
Rock with the ram, and thundering spoke to spoke,
Each hard on each, both fain and neither first,
Raced for the crashing gap that Ramoth gave
Together. And let all attendant here,
Of Israel and of Judah, host and guest,
Stand off and leave us private with the Queen
Till the day darken to our banquet high.

[They go out.]

JEZEBEL.

Many respects in one main welcome join
To greet the boast of Ahab's blood, the flower
Last-left and proudest of King David's stock.
O prince, Desert hath been thy trumpeter
Within our courts ; and ten full-laden years
Have come and gone the richer for thy deeds
Since at Jerusalem in tourney first,⁽³⁾
A stalwart boy new-clad in glittering arms,
These aged eyes beheld thee and were blessed.
How present yet is that day's memory
Unto my heart ! High-throned upon the wall
We sate, and the green meadowland beneath
Thundered and lightened with the festal fray,
And headless javelins canopied the sun,
Shading our view, and all the air was loud
With cries of the unhurt : and still I marked,
Musing amid that turbulence and noise,
How far astray the old King's glances roamed
O'er the bright peers and comrades of thy blood
Which Judah then in youth and pride adorned⁽⁴⁾
Ere Death's unpitied sickle pruned the house,
Nor stayed for any, neither dwelt on shield
With past achievement rich, nor crown acquired
In bloodier war, but sought and singled thee,
The best, the blithest of that youngling band
Which hurled the dart, and clashed the sword, and
fled,

Swift as a flock of sea-birds down the gale,
With cheeks that put their ruddy plumes to shame,
And eyes that matched their morions : fair thou
wert

In boyhood's dawn, and fair thou art, O King,
In manhood's day ; nor count it cause of wrath
If somewhat idly my fond heart o'erflow,
For joy and silence never yet were friends.
Of this enough. My lord the King and I,
Jezebel, mate and mother of the King,
As to thy sire and grandsire, so to thee
Do now hereby make proffer of our love.
Nor ask nor use we any hindering help
Of unconsidered scroll or legate vain,
Which oftentimes the likeliest purpose mar,
But trust, and pray thee thou wilt also trust,
No word but that which lives upon the lip ;
For kings with kings should converse or with
none.

Take counsel, Ahaziah ; we are thine ;
And where canst thou more firmlier base thy
throne

Than on the rock Ahab and Omri built,
Sun-lit and storm-contemning ? No brief raid
Against the Syrian, no fame-frittered war,
No drought-foiled foray, no midsummer siege,
But one broad front of enmity and love,
A compact barrier to what foe soe'er,

One sword, one shield, one aim, and one success,
We offer ; light alliance, casual bonds,
Go ask thy counsellors if such availed
Him that begat thee ; go where Edom's top,
Ringed with wrecked chariots and splintered
spears,

Records their value in thy captains' blood :
Or ask it of the burgher lords that lie
Where Libnah's milk-white citadel delays
Thy vengeance, pranked upon her sunny plain ;
At ease they lie and make thine arms a mock ;
And part the lagging day mid sleep and song,
And crown the cup of toll and tithe secure !
Yea, we too proved the profit of such bonds,
We too of Israel, at our worst extreme,
When plague and famine in Samaria slew,
And spearmen of Damascus kept the gate,
And none drew nigh for counsel or for war.
Oh, what ill wind hath blown upon our love
And tainted it with doubt ? What hope, what
help

Have we but in each other ? All our friends
Fall off : Tyre's narrow lordship 'neath the weight
Of two crowns totters. All our foes press on :
The Assyrian horse already sniff the sea ;
Egypt besets thy boundaries, and looks
Sideways upon occasion ; Moab hates
And trembles ; and e'en now on Ramoth's hill

The gloomy murderer numbers up his dead.
Think then, O King,—for thee it touches : thee
The early birth of morning yet illumines ;
Us the night follows :—these two kingdoms think
As children whom Necessity, dire nurse,
Hath put at foolish variance for her jest,
And let thine own, let Judah eldest-born
With joyful tears receive her brother babe
At last, long penitent, to peace and love.

AHAZIAH.

Lady, thy words are rain upon the sea.
What more can I ? Is Gilead forgot ?
Hath not my house been ever one with thine ?
And are not all ill memories long since
Washed clean away in blood of common war ?

JEZEBEL.

Ay, soothly are they : we have waded deep.
Each in his grave the untroubled dead abide :
They fold their hands and rest ; and why should
we
Remember those old quarrels they forget ?
Ay, there is no such stain upon our love :
'Tis no such easy difference that doth part
Israel from Judah, and from Judah's King
His kingdom ; but impiety, and a god
Offended for a people : tell me thou,

Sprung even as I from Sidon's royal stock,
Is there a pang in the wide world so keen
As insult, and the memory of wrong
Foregone but not forgiven? With axe and cord
They pulled him down; they took his glory hence:
They left his temple desolate: the vile
Smote his mute lips: and for dishonour done,
For profanation and permitted shame,
What reap we of reward? Doth Jah descend
In blessing on us? Doth the priest that bows,
Unchided, at thy very palace gate
Remit one curse from my devoted head,
Or pray for thy prosperity, his King?
'Tis all or nothing that Jehovah seeks:
Divided sacrifice He brooketh not:
And there shall be—or so I think, if age
Which dulls the body hath forborne the mind—
No certain love between us, apt to join
Our kingdoms in a true and lasting peace,
Till every tongue Jehovah's name forswear
And every knee at Baal's altar bow.
Lo then, I speak it not in wrath or haste:
Judge and determine, for the cause is thine.

AHAZIAH.

O Queen, my cause is but thine own in brief:
For as that shape immortal whom we mourn
Did soar beyond all meaner peaks and lift

A brow above our darkness bright with day,
So in the radiance of thy wisdom thou,
Remote from earth and earth's comparisons,
Dost shine exalted o'er thy fellow kings.
Think not I lack the veneration due,
O Jezebel, to thee ; whate'er thy will,
Even such is mine : and though Jehovah tread
With firmer foot among our tribes than here,
Yet can no shadowy blessings from a god
Outweigh the sure displeasure of a king :
Death and advancement, gold and steel, are
 charms
More powerful to coerce and to persuade
Than all the thunderbolts in heaven packed.

JEZEBEL.

Why then, thou art the sentry for whose step
We long have listened, keeping watch all night
Upon the edge of this corpse-covered field :
Now breaks the golden morning, and our guard
Henceforth is thine ; we sheath the sword, and doff
The battered harness, and hang up the helm,
And well-content give place to younger limbs,
For grey-haired Time is captain of our watch.
Take then the perilous wardship we have kept,
O King, and prosper ; let the sword maintain
What the sword won, and may no mercy dull
The point of thy success. Our lot shall be

More humble, yet not lack its pleasure too :
For sweet the solace of inglorious days
To the tired veterans of life-long war ;
Sweet is't at length to be set free of care ;
Sweet to lie softly in the perfumed hall
And hear the minstrel chant at eventide,
Sounding the silver harp, of priest and king
And them that for their country died of wounds :
When all are still ; and down the festal board
The rows of jewelled cups unlifted shine ;
While happy tears the radiant cressets dim,
And Joy sits dreaming in the Ivory House.⁽⁵⁾

WATCHMAN.

I see a company.

JEZEBEL.

The Watchman cries.

WATCHMAN.

I see a company, my lord the King ;
A cloud of dust that down the mountain crawls
Nigh where the widening water-course is low
At summer solstice ; numerous by its girth ;
And warlike, by the guess of glittering spears.

JEHORAM.

Take horse, and find their purport ! Shut the
gates,

And see that no man enter in nor out
Till he return, and call straightway to arms
The warriors in the city and her youth.
Look not amazed, my lord, for wisdom still
Doth teach great care is parent of long life :
Our humble town to-day from end to end
Is stocked as full with princes as the hut
Of avarice with gold : a prize were we
Rich and desirable.

AHAZIAH.

Yet surely none
Of force to win it could unmarked draw nigh :
No pillar of black smoke against the blue ;
No horse foam-flecked to noise him ; not a word
Of harried cattle or down-trampled corn.
The feet of War are cased in louder steel.
Yonder, belike, are certain of my kin,⁽⁶⁾
Who had in mind, as well I know, to come
And cheer with me, whate'er our wit avail,
This tedious retirement of thy sword.

JEZEBEL.

How chance they come by Jordan, mighty King ?
Southward the way : and if their purpose hold
They lie within Samaria's gates to-night ;
To-morrow with the rosy dawn we rise
And greet their love and bring them to Jezreel.

They that march yonder are not decked and
trapped

In holiday attire, but girt for war,
Steel-clad in total harness ; and methinks
O'er many for a peaceful retinue.

JEHORAM.

I strain mine eyes, but nothing can I see
Save a confusion of bright mail and dust
Crimson as blood in the declining sun.

WATCHMAN.

The messenger, my lord the King, took horse
And reached their ranks, but cometh not again.
He cometh not again, nor tarry they.
Slowly and steadily they march, and now
Discover plain to see on nearer view
Ensigns of Israel and domestic arms.

JEHORAM.

Let one of the chief captains of the gate
Ride forth, and have charge absolute to turn
Back with all speed. If yonder ranks be ours
I marvel who should stay my messenger.

JEZEBEL.

When kings are sick obedience sickens too.
Some tidings of grave import, good or bad,
To make or mar this banquet that we hold,

Are on their way toward our battlements ;
But which in truth I know not nor can guess :
Disaster rides with looser rein, and what
Should Victory do hither ?

AHAZIAH.

Hath my lord
Heard aught of late from Gilead, how they fare ?

JEHORAM.

'Tis now three days and all things there were well :
The breach we made was strengthened, and the
foe,
Albeit grudgingly, were falling back ;
Their trumpets echoed faintlier day by day,
And night by night their watch-fires further shone.

WATCHMAN.

The messenger, my lord, comes not again :
And up and down between their ranks I see
One driving like to Jehu, Nimshi's son,
Who furiously driveth.

JEZEBEL.

Even so :

Aye doth the people's favourite o'ertask
The King's regard. There is no person else
But only Nimshi's too-much honoured child
Dare pick and choose among thy strait com-
mands.

He hath some eager history of war,
Some tale of doubtful stratagem or fight,
That told by other tongue might lack its meed ;
And therefore hath he kept thy messenger :
My lord doth ill to grant him so much grace.

JEHORAM.

Mayhap he bringeth us Hazael's head,
And that shall be his pardon. Let them yoke
My chariot. If it like thee, thou and I,
King Ahaziah, will ourselves set out
And meet what fortune bringeth us midway.

AHAZIAH.

My path, O King Jehoram, lies with thine.

[They go out.]

JEZEBEL.

Now let the quarry turn what way it will
There is no rescue from the savage dogs
That gape upon its flank. Let hart and hind
Look for like mercy on a hunting-morn
With such as serve Jehovah : I will not
Be pitiful as of old ; I will not bound
My fell pursuit with favour or with place ;
Prayer shall not turn me neither woman's tears ;
Nor age already to the tomb addressed ;
Nor childhood wailing on the brink of life.
As runneth a red fire from field to field

When the winds follow and no human help
Can quench it, and the mowers mourn and lift
Palms unavailing to the empty sky,
E'en so my anger and my hot revenge
Shall run across this kingdom : I will be
More terrible with years ; gray locks shall clothe
Authority and wrath with double dread.
There is no niche remaining in the world,
There is no corner they can fly to now :
Judah, the sheepfold, hath an open door,
And gives her weanlings naked to the wind,
And leaves her lambs defenceless to the wolf.
And if he will or nil my son for shame,
Bound by the preparation that we make,
No longer can forbear them. Sleep be far !
Be far, ye trivial thoughts and light affairs !
And thou, e'en thou, inevitable Death,
Delay thy dart, until high heaven's intent
I may accomplish ; till the clouds that long
Have dimly canopied our hapless realm
Melt, and the priests of desolation fly ;
And wretched men, once more, the little while
They win from darkness, may enjoy the day
And quaff their cups, and sleep their sleep, and live.
Their lives untrammelled of vain fear or hope.

WATCHMAN.

Alas ! the King is slain !

JEZEBEL.

What cry is this ?

WATCHMAN.

Jehu hath slain the King and Judah flies ;
To right and left they scatter, and the King
Is slain.

JEZEBEL.

O treason black !

WATCHMAN.

Be hence !
All's rout, dismay, and casting of the shield.

JEZEBEL.

The rout is theirs, and the dismay is thine :
Doth Jezebel yet live, thou voice of fear ?

*[She goes into the palace. There is a
sound of assault, and after a pause
the CHORUS enter confusedly.]*

CHORUS.

O mothers, upon Ashtaroth call !
Cry out on Ashtaroth, maidens, cry !
For lo ! indifferent round us all
The random wraths of the Immortals fly ;
Their bolts enlargéd blacken the blue sky.
Oh, to what haven shall our sails be set ?

Where shall the innocent take horse and flee ?
With a king's blood the sword is wet.
Helpless and shelterless to thee
We come ; O mother of the night, be near !
What yet abideth guilt, if guilt there be,
Oh, hide us in thy darkness ere we see,
And cover up our faces lest we hear.

[JEZEBEL *re-enters and passes across the stage.*

JEZEBEL.

Bark, Baal-Zephon, for the foe is nigh.
Discord and treachery break thy kingdom up.
The feet of Death come hither ; the loud axe
Beats at the door. Aidless and desolate,
Childless, abandoned of mine own I stretch
These hands, O Baal, toward thee, until now
Ne'er without gifts upon thine altar laid,
And charge thee by the odour of slain blood,
That still hath mounted upward morn and eve,
Thou check thy golden rein ere day be done,
And bend to hear me from thy chariot bright,
And grant the boon I beg, this while the last,
Dying, not life, not vengeance, but to die,
As fits, O Baal, thy votaress and their Queen.

[*She goes in.*

CHORUS.

Loud upon post, loud upon lintel sounding,

The axes crash, the hammers ring :
I see a line of fire the gates surrounding ;
I hear the deadly hail of bow and sling.
Treason invades thy sanctuary, O King !
The panels gape apart, the bolts are burst,
And dreadful faces, black with smoke and flame,
And haggard eyes for blood athirst,
Come, as in visions of the night they came ;
And one I see, erewhile of better fame,
Hard-riding where the broken gates are down ;
His arms in blood are dabbled, and his bow
Is bent ; his form I know ;
But on his glittering helmet shines a crown.

[JEHU *enters attended.*

JEHU.

Mothers and maids of Israel, greet your King !
I have o'erthrown the oppressor : I have slain
The leavings of the Arabian.(4)

CHORUS.

Thou we greet
With humble heart, O Captain, or if King.

JEHU.

Fear not : this wrath is of the Lord your God.
Lift up your eyes, and let your lips declare
Which way hath fled the sorceress whom we
seek.

CHORUS.

Bid not our lips slay her who nourished them.

JEHU.

Or condemnation takes the guiltless too.

CHORUS.

We speak of force, unwilling : from our sight
At yonder door, brief supplication made,
Passed like a phantom the white-vested Queen.

JEHU.

Come then, ye fellows of mine enterprise,
And uproot utterly this curséd house.

[*They go in.*

CHORUS.

Who shall distribute judgment ? who shall dare
To take upon him to apportion guilt ?
For the just blood unjustly spilt
Dividing his own share,
Nor more nor less, to each.
Since the gods never taught us nor will teach.
And unto dead men oft it appertaineth,
Who lie safe-housed and little care
Though wrath come late and when the field be
bare,
After much prophecy and doubtful speech,

The gods glean what remaineth.
For so they hang their laws out of our reach.
And we upon foundations not our own
Build, adding stone to stone,
And level the four walls with plumb and line
Which shut us closely round, do what we can,
Nor reck that half was built ere we began,
That other fingers wove the dark design
Long since and drew the plan.
A narrow choice the gods have given to man :
Only, for they would have it so,
Blood drips on blood, we know,
And one or other pays the debt of all :
Sooner or later him the waves o'erwhelm ;
And they that slew the pilot take the helm,
And where new hopes and happier fortunes call
With equal sheet and freshening gale they go,
Fearless though tempests blow
And clouds make black the heaven ; yet for these
There waits perchance ere any port they gain
Like peril and like pain ;
For the gods watch them, and the popular breeze
Prevails on dangerous seas.

[*JEHU enters.*

JEHU.

More apt at warfare than at words am I,
And one for whom 'tis easier to succeed,

O mothers, than to justify success.

Yet will I now set right mine innocence,

If words can do it ; knowing, as I look

Upon the shaded aspect of your brows,

And on your crouching forms and faces pale,

How grim and treasonous these deeds appear.

For now is the great house of Ahab fallen ;

Jehoram in the plot of Naboth lies :

They sleep one sleep, the oppressor and the
oppressed.

And he whom divine judgment or ill chance

Joined to his kin is dead, or hurt to death,

And with idolatry pollutes no more

The diadem of Asa ; only one

Abode my coming ; only one withstood

My righteous wrath, and splashed upon these arms

Behold the blood of Jezebel your Queen !

Her in whose baleful radiance king by king

Walked insignificant, and crown by crown

Shone of its glory robbed. For passing hence

Under the tower neath the river-gate

There fell a sudden silence, and a hush

Upon our ranks ; no trumpet blew, the song

Of triumph died ; sword clashed not upon shield ;

And every man stood doubtful in his place.

For throned above us on the outer wall,

Beyond her wont magnificent, she sate,

She whom we sought : with trembling arm a slave

Fanned her ; and left and right about her chair
The eunuchs of the inner palace stood,
Blazing with gold : nor Merodach herself
Was ever yet upon a summer's morn
More decked for festival than she for death.
And while we stared amazedly, as one
That brooked no passage of unbended knee,
She stooped, and cried with a loud voice and clear,
' Greeting to Zimri, slayer of his lord !'
And none threw dart or javelin, such a spell
Had her doomed majesty : wherefore I bade,
If any were on my side, let them straight
Cast her before me ; and the eunuchs took
Firm hold upon her robes, and cast her down,
A mass of jewelled garniture and blood,
Among the trampling forefeet of my steeds.
Such a death died Sidonian Jezebel :
And all that looked upon her loathly fall
Upraised a clamour jubilant to heaven,
For this was the Lord's doing : now fulfilled,
Though late, the word Elijah spake of old,
When nigh King Ahab's chariot I stood,
That in his son's day He would bring the curse,
And in the plot of Naboth of Jezreel
He would requite him, said the Lord his God.
Whereof on me was the fulfilment laid
To utterly destroy my master's house,
Commissioned to the death of each and all

By that wild messenger who ran untired
To Ramoth, and upon our council brake,
Took me apart, and with the holy oil
Anointed ; and the captains of the host,
Who, gathered then, were meditating war,
Hearing the word of doom Elisha sent,
Blew trumpet, and accepted me their King.
And what I did ye know, and what I do
Henceforth shall not be hidden : in the light
Are all my deeds, by all men to be judged.
For lo ! what manner of a King was this,
Who, while the weary soldier dug the trench,
And ground the arrow, and kept bright the mail,
Lay nerveless in the arms of luxury ?
Who stayed not for the rough embrace of war,
But at the first touch of her fingers fled
And sought brief shelter in a woman's robe ?
Was this the blood of Omri ? This the stock
Of princely Ahab ? This the mighty house
That crowned with victory and kingship came
From four long years of battle and of toil ?
Nor earlier suffered in those seven days
Foothold on earth to that usurping lord,
But inch by inch, and street by flaming street,
Still kept him close and ever drave him back,
Till he and all his counsels soared to Heaven
In one great blast of fire ?—Go, sit ye down,
And ponder now these doings of the Lord ;

Nor think him slain unjustly of whose life
Indolence first made forfeit. For ourselves,
With travel and with bloodshed worn we go ;
Lamps for another kindled light us hence,
And alien banquets call us to the board.

[He goes in.]

CHORUS.

Alas ! in an ill hour the bark,
First fatal messenger of friendly kings,
With woodland wealth betwixt her wings,
High-piled, a mighty store,
Pale fir and cedar dark,
Eager another goal to mark,
Put off from palaces by Sidon's shore,
And turned her rudder to fresh waves, and bore
To Joppa that rich load : for then
Fated, though hidden from the sons of men,
Albeit no prophet knew,
Fated already was the bridal crew
Which came with music at the break of morn
And silken sail with laughter set,
Bringing upon our coast, ill-met
For many a child unborn,
And strange to a strange nation,
The dark-browed priestess-maid,
While heaven rang and all the winds were laid
With harp and song and cries of gratulation.
For even so

They steered light-hearted to a port of woe :
And nigh the hospitable strand
The Tyrian ships which convoyed them to land
Did at the word, this way and that, divide ;
And 'neath a canopy of carven gold
A pinnacle brought the bride :
Twelve rowers clad in scarlet rowed a side ;
As pale and fair, a wonder to behold,
Over against the day begun,
Proudly she came in royal purple dight,
And red as blood her rubies took the sun
Amid her tresses black as night :
And valiant kings upon her left and right
Sate in that hour, her father and her lord,
Seeming a double bulwark and a sword
Two-edged ; yet all their might
Is fallen, and their war-cry dumb in fight.
And when the narrow space was o'er
Light leapt the King to shore,
And on the beach, for that the sea was calm
And temperate blew the gale,
Gave thanks, and duteous in no rite to fail
Lit perfume to the Lady of the Palm,(7)
And bade all gods be noted,
And trumpet loud and dulcimer full-throated
Salute the blissful deity of Baal.
So to new lands, with pomp of silver mail,
And prancing horsemen clustering round the prow,

'Neath flower-decked banners came the Queen,
 who now
Wanders a bloodless spirit pale,
Seeking her own in desolate abodes,
Having long borne the unremitted goads
Of angry Fortune, having seen her own
Arrived at that drear place by many roads,
Each sad acceptor of a blood-stained throne
Slain ere his day by sickness or by sword,
And him, her kindly, her undaunted lord,
Worse woe than prophet e'er revealed,
Ignobly dead, a fugitive from field.
Ah who, to whatso measure sorrow bade
Tuning his harp, what minstrel might essay
To fitly sing the record of that day
For which all songs are sad ?
When not in royal raiment clad,
Neither apparelled as the risen sun
In robes of glittering sheen,
But bare of blazonry, in armour mean,
With naught that might his worth betoken,
Misdoubting if Jehovah's doom had spoken
Through many or through one,
The gracious leader whom our songs lament
To his last foray went :
And round about him stood the ranks unbroken.
And no man knew him : but the Syrian said,
'The cubs shall scatter if the lion be dead :

Fight not with great nor small,
But with the King of Israel ; him pursue.'
Yet not the thirty captains nor the two
With footmen or with horsemen wrought his fall,
Ranging the long day through ;
But one that spied a warrior tall,
From whose encounter every sword did shrink,
Doughtily doing on the battle's brink,
And to the barb his deathly arrow drew,
Unknown himself, nor knowing whom he slew :
And that great head, the fear
Of Israel's foemen, drooped and fell,
Beacon whereby his flags shall steer
No more across the battle's stormy swell,
And that strong voice which did the battle quell,
And check the sounding rout, doth cry,
Whispering weakly, ' Sorely hurt am I :
Oh, turn thy rein, thou charioteer.'
Who bent his head the word to hear,
And turned his rein, and far to southward fled,
O'er shivered arms and splashing pools of dead,
Back to the quiet tent :
And a great cry, hard upon evening, went
Through all the host, ' Let every man depart
To his own city, and to his own land.'
They laid him in Samaria sword in hand,
Deep in the rock, midmost the busy mart,
And reared a tomb above, with Tyrian art

Engraven ; all the battles which he won,
And all the towns he built :
There Moab fled ; there Hadad's mighty son
Weighed out the lavish gold, his life redeeming ;
And radiant columns high to heavenward gleaming
They set, of fragrant cedar carved and gilt ;
And frankincense about the tomb they spilt,
And blood, that with due service he might go
'Mid them which reign below ;
And priest and prophet wrought mysterious
 charms,
And burnt their spices round him to and fro,
And did the king much honour ; yet men say
That where they washed his chariot and his arms
Dogs lapped his blood that day :
Though soothly little recked he if 'twere so,
In cerements swathed, or no,
Mute in the earth, all trouble past and pain ;
Neither would we with over-hasty strain
Affirm it nor deny,
If Heaven, angered at the cry
Of Naboth and his unavengéd wrong,
The bounds of human malice might disdain
And desecrate the slain.
Howe'er it be his warriors mourned him long,
And they that loved him for his sake were sad ;
They let their harness rust, no joy they had :
They put away their banquetings and song :

No Image in Samaria now was clad
With festal garb, no shrine was decked with
flowers ;

But heavily went Israel all his hours,
Being weak, and sorrowed for the strong ;
And watched his banners in the war-front falter,
With stubborn knee unbent and sullen brow,
Nor cared to make vain sacrifice and vow
Upon a careless altar ;
For frail the might that led his banners now.
But the fierce masters of the fleece
Did in their bounds increase,
And Chemosh gave them triumph and waxed fat :
Rich with his servants' gratitude he sate,
Whose might was now approved, whose promise
kept,

In peace and war obedient to their claim :
And ever if he waked or slept
Around his furnaces armed figures leapt,
And flung the spoil upon them, and sang shame
On Israel's ancient fame,
Crying ' Great things of him are told ;
Yea, mighty deeds he did in days of old,
And many nations knew his arrows keen,
Judæan, Assyrian, Damascene,
And honoured his high places :
But now his knees are loose, his blood is cold,
His gods have hid their faces ;

His strength is gone astray :
He hath a sword of rush ; he slingeth clay ;
And floating emptily afar
As wheat upon the wind his arrows are.'
So chanted Moab to their rising star :
But grief with us bare sway,
And indignation in our breast abode ;
Till the King died the death he owed
Whom no man feared, whom every foe o'ercame,
Lord to our loss and leader to our shame,
Whose chariots ne'er set forward but to fly,
Whose ships for aught but shipwreck never sailed :
Little the whisper of his god availed
At Ekron, that he might not die,
When came his hour, and pass as pass the mean ;
For not amid the blaze of battle seen,
Wedging the shielded phalanx of the foe,
When wrath and valour conquer woe,
And the press thickens and the axes swing,
But in his darkened chamber died the King.
Alas, what sorrows new
Come toward us now ? Why flock the rabble
 through,
With eager faces, half-averse ?
And who be these which walk before
And carry litters splashed with gore ?
Ay me ! must every woe forebode a worse
To Israel evermore ?

And the dread Angel of the curse
Stay but to strike the stroke of doom
On one and on another, then resume
His journey to the ending,
His awful way in silence wending
Into the nethermost recess of gloom ?

[*The MESSENGER enters.*

MESSENGER.

Set down, set down the load of death ye bear,
And stand apart till Jehu's will be known.
O maidens, bring me to my lord the King.

CHORUS.

Look to the man who cometh, purple-robed,
Out of the feast, and hath upon his brow
A kingly circlet : him, or whom thou wilt,
Take for thy lord if lord of thine he be.

[*JEHU enters.*

MESSENGER.

Before thy feet, victorious King, I fall ;
Low I abase me to the ground, and lay
Dust on thy servant's forehead. Peace and health
By me the elders of Samaria send,
To whom there came a letter from my lord :
'Horses and chariots and a city fenced
Ye have, and armour and your master's sons ;

Look out the meetest of your master's sons,
And set him on his father's throne, and fight
For the King's house.' Whereat to prove their
love,

Illustrious captain, unto thee, they slew
The seed of Ahab, even seventy men,
Whose heads, no doubtful token of goodwill,
Upon these litters to my lord I bear.

JEHU.

O mothers, ye be righteous! true it is
Jezebel and Jehoram I have slain,
Two branches of one stock, and Judah's King.
But whose insatiate sword hath slaughtered these?
O mothers, of your righteousness, condemn,
If ye condemn, judge, if ye needs must judge,
All Israel, judging me.

CHORUS.

The weak may well
Pardon, dread King, what mighty heaven permits.
Judgment and condemnation are not ours.

JEHU.

Hear yet how God hath fought upon my side,
And clearly manifested my revenge
One with His own. I bade them take and lay
In earth this woman whom the Lord had doomed,

Not willing a king's daughter at our hands
Should lack a base man's burial : to the Lord
It seemed far other ; for no more they found
But only the bare skull and splintered bones
Of her that sate majestic so long
Governing Israel : was not this the word
Wherewith Elijah to King Ahab spake ?
' Dogs of the city shall devour thy dead
And birds of heaven them that flee away.'
And touching Jezebel he spake again,
' The Lord Almighty, even the Lord God
Shall throw her in the portion of Jezreel,
On the field's face, a carcase for the kites
To mangle, and a quarrelling for dogs ;
And none shall say hereafter when ye search,
Take up and bury : this was Jezebel.'
Look to it then if ye by word or deed,
Or gloomy face reproachful of our joy,
Be found among the Lord God's enemies.
And ye of Shamar, set your offerings up,
This bloody tribute that your elders send,
Heaped in two heaps before my palace-gate ;
That all men which go in and out may see
How Israel hath been weary of this house,
And what deliverance the Lord our God
Hath wrought for us and our posterity.

[*He goes in.*

CHORUS.

Pile up the heads, the heads of princes ! We
Have known them oft in banquet and in fight,
Leading the van upon their kinsman's right,
Or in the halls of revel bending knee.
Pile them the pillars of thine house to be.
Nor dream that a God watcheth day and night,
With eyes uncloséd, o'er us all,
And houses in blood founded in blood fall.

THE END.

NOTES.

(¹) Ramoth-Gilead was one of the Cities of Refuge.—
Deut. iv. 43.

(²) Ahijah.—1 Kings xi. 30.

(³) *Cf.* Josephus, Ant. ix. 3. 1.

(⁴) 2 Chronicles xxi. 17.

(⁵) 'And the Ivory House which he made.'—1 Kings
xxii. 39.

(⁶) *Cf.* 2 Kings x. 13.

(⁷) The palm was the symbol of Ashtaroth.

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